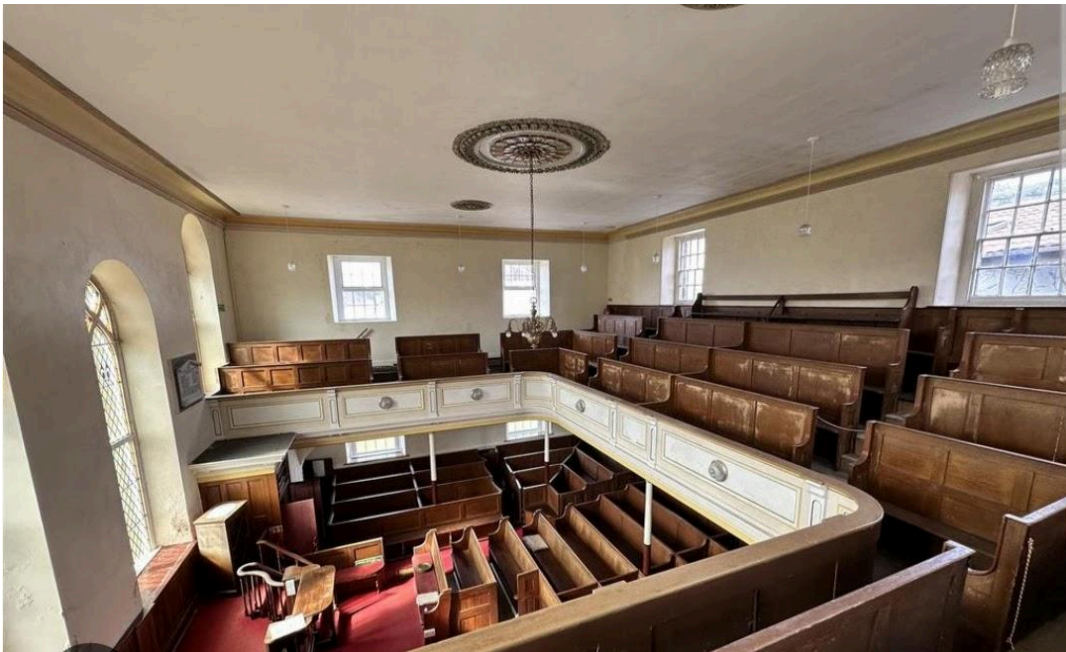


Seion Chapel
Fforest Hill, Aberdula, SA10 8HD

Heritage Impact Assessment

August 2026

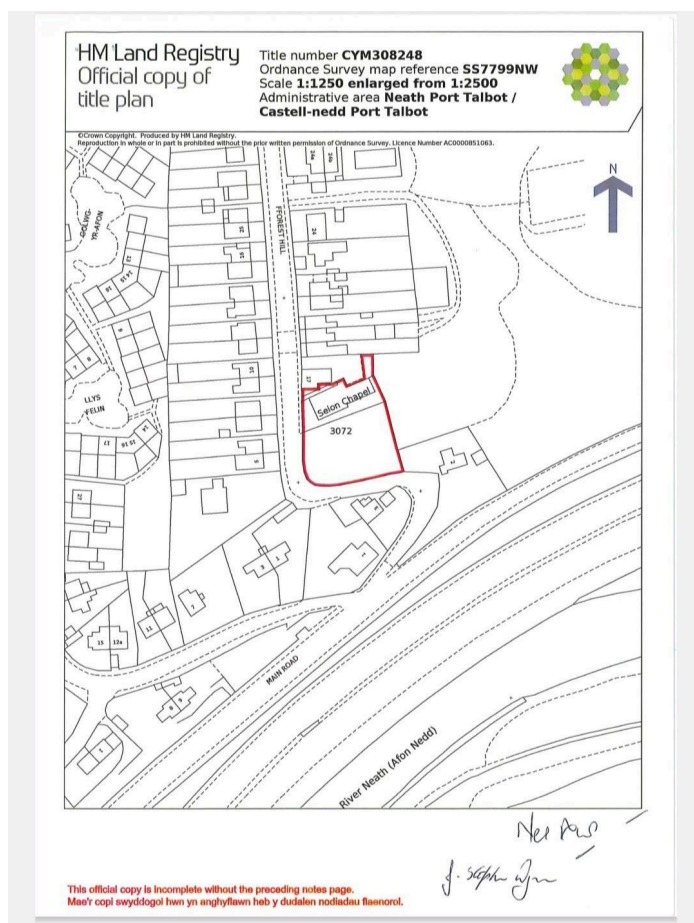


Introduction

This heritage statement has been prepared in order to assess proposals to remove pews within the main hall of Seion Calvinistic Methodist Chapel, Aberdulais. The Chapel is grade 2 listed and therefore careful planning and consideration to the proposed changes are needed to protect the existing historical significance of the chapel and also make it a useful space for the community again. Inspections have been carried out on the property by a surveyor in order for the proposed changes to be made appropriately with the requirements of planning law and policy.

Location

Seion Methodist Chapel is situated facing S on the N side of the valley of the Afon Nedd, some 50m N of the junction of Fforest Hill and the A465. The chapel is located within its own grounds just off Fforest Hill road. It has a public right of way to the front of the chapel giving access to the graveyard. See location plan below.



1. Historic Interest of the building:

Seion Fforest Chapel was originally a non-conformist Church that was founded by five men, one being Lewis Jones Griffiths. Griffiths was a land agent from the nearby Ynysgerwen Estate. The Chapel was originally built in 1839 but suffered a

fire and therefore the Chapel was rebuilt in 1860. The Chapel became the property of The Presbyterian Church of Wales up until its recent closure and now Church on the Move have a 10 year lease on the building.

From conversations with the surrounding residents of Aberdulais and the previous congregation, the Church has been the hub of the community since it opened. This chapel saw families grow, couples marry and loved ones buried in the graveyard in front of the chapel, as well as help those most in need. This church even welcomed the great revivalist Evan Roberts during the 1904 Welsh revival. 'The Western Mail' on the 15th January 1905 describes the meetings held at the chapel that day.

Situated on the side of the main hall is a 'lesser hall' where a plaque in memory of Reverend William Davies (1727-1787) was erected and remains there to this day. The Chapel was in use every single day by the local community up until the late 70's. With an ageing congregation and diminishing finances, it became impossible to keep it open.

2. Heritage Asset Designations:

Seion Chapel is Grade 2 and the listing description is provided below.

History

Calvinistic Methodist Chapel of 1860, rebuilding of a chapel of 1839. Railings outside of the early C20 suggest some alteration then, presumably to glazing. The chapel is associated with the Rev William Davies 1727-97, noted Methodist preacher and hymnodist.

Exterior

Chapel, coursed rock-faced sandstone in narrow courses with flush sandstone dressings and C20 concrete tiles to roof. Long-wall front of 2 arched centre lights, 2 upper arched gallery lights and 2 doors in gabled porches, set between inner and outer windows. All windows are long, with stone voussoirs, rusticated jambs and stone sills. Late C19 leaded glazing and unusual timber 2-light tracery, the bars intersecting ogee in heads. Plaque above and between centre windows. Porches are gabled with stone voussoirs to entrance arches. Inset doors, raised plinth. Left end wall has 2-storey, 2-window range of 16-pane homed sash windows and paired brackets to overhanging gable verges. Two-storey, two-window rough rubble stone rear wall with 16-pane sashes and stone voussoirs. Right end has single-storey vestry with sash windows to gable wall above vestry.

Interior

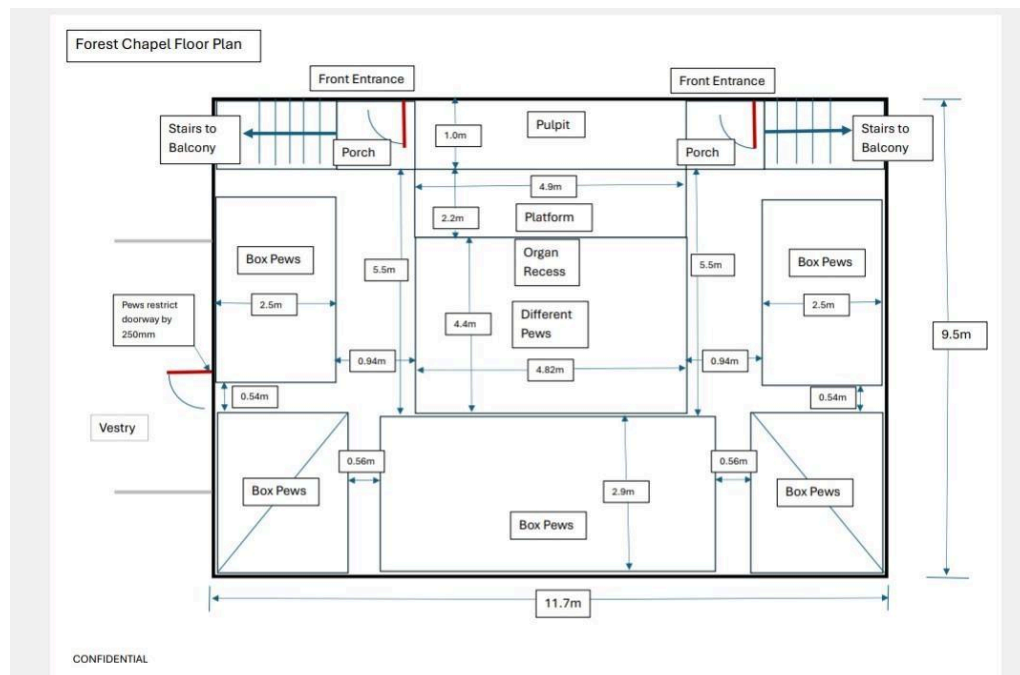
Three-sided gallery on 5 iron columns, painted front with curved angles, deep cornice and paired brackets. Brackets are under arch-panelled pilasters that separate long horizontal panels. Moulded top rail. Painted grained box pews to side and rear, raked up under galleries. Pine pews to centre block with shaped bench ends and similar 3-sided set fawr. Broad platform in centre of entrance wall between 2 lobbies, solid pulpit front with serpentine balustrades each side curving back to balustraded stairs with ramped rails and slim turned newels. Frontal is panelled with inset bulbous columns at angles. Panelled back wall to platform. Various marble plaques including one of 1907 to the Rev William Davies of Neath, 1727-87, pioneer of Methodism in the area. Galleries have painted grained pael backed pews and panelled dado. Ceiling has plain cornice and centre rose with acanthus and laurel rim. Vestry has boarded roof with iron ties.

Reason for designation

Included as a well-designed and well-preserved long-wall chapel of 1860, built during the period of the Great Revival. Historical association with William Davies, preacher and hymnodist.

3. Description of Development:

The proposal is to remove the centre pews (*different pews*) located in the middle of the hall.



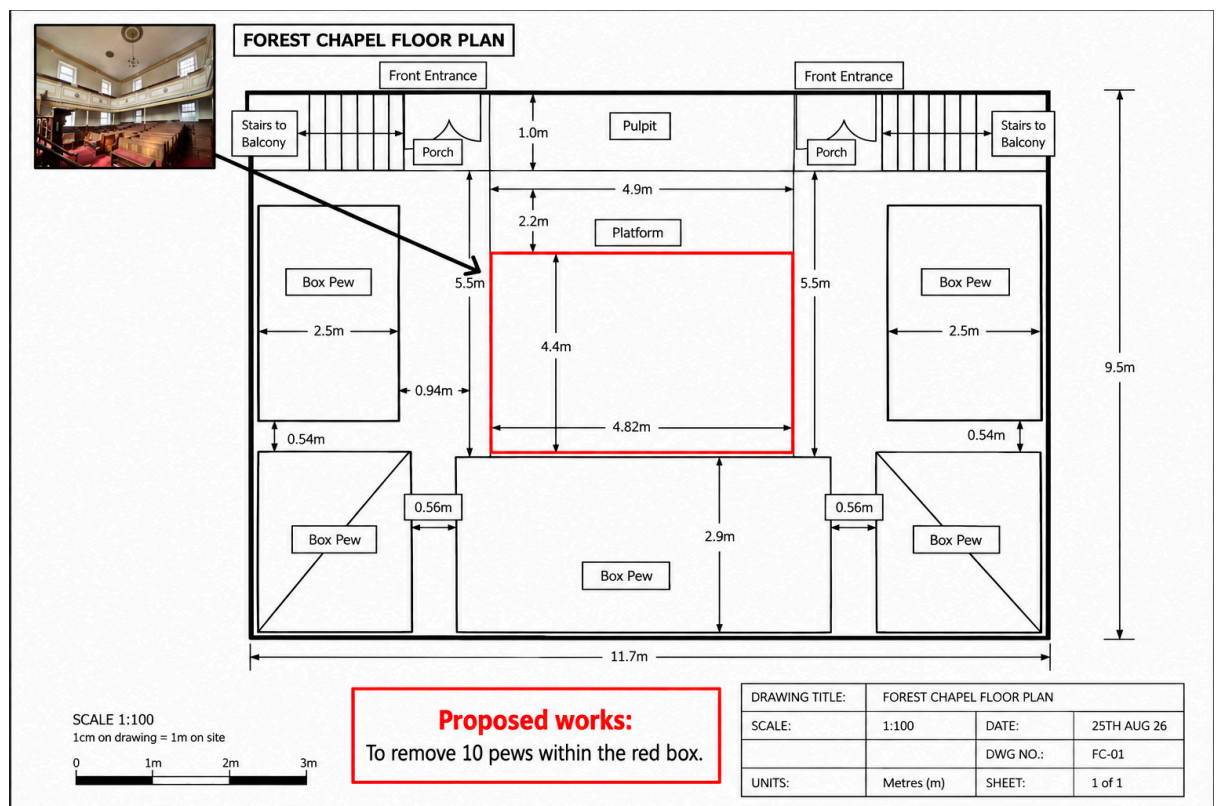
This area consists of 10 pine pews with panelled backs and an organ recess which is currently a void area after the organ was removed a year ago by the previous congregation.



Above shows the ten benches to be removed. This will be done by a carpenter and some handy men who will remove the whole section and then make good of the platform that the pews sit on. The concept is to have this area as a wide open space which will become a multi functional space. The plan is to retain the original chapel feel and ensure there is no adverse impact on the setting of the hall.

It is also important to note that the 10 pine pews are different from the box pews surrounding the pine pews. The pine pews are of a different era and look like they have come from another church. The box pews are a thinner material and an obvious different style.

Below shows the plans for this proposal.



4. Explanation of Objective:

By removing the centre pews the space would become more versatile. Whilst we intend to hold the occasional church service, especially around events such as Christmas, the space would become useful for community use such as Parent and baby club, mental health groups, exercise classes and general community gatherings.

We would like to give this chapel a new lease of life for the community and therefore by removing the pews it becomes a more practical space that will have longevity and give back to the community what they have missed for over 40 years. It is necessary to remove these pews because the hall would only be useful for church services which would only happen a handful of times a year. By removing the pews the hall could be in use every single day, meeting the needs of the residents of Aberdulais.

We have considered the possibility of removing all the pews on the main floor as this would make the area larger for alternative uses. However, due to the negative impact on the look of the chapel we have decided against this option. We feel by removing all of the pews the chapel would not retain some of its vital historical features and would devalue its historical significance.

We have also considered not removing any pews and working around the existing layout of the chapel. However this would render the hall practically useless in our objectives in the use of the hall. By keeping all the pews in place, the space would not be flexible enough to accommodate the various community activities. By having a more flexible area means our scope for reaching various groupings within the community is increased. It is also important for the preservation of the chapel to have a more flexible space. This means that the hall will be in use for years to come.

5. Positive Impact of works:

The positive impact that these works will have on the use of the building will be of great magnitude. The chapel will be given a new lease of life for the community, as well as an appreciation for the historical value of the church. We will be displaying as much history of the chapel on the walls as possible as a reminder of the wonderful people that run the church over its long history.

As the works are minimal in comparison with the size of the building and will be sympathetic to the style of the interior, there will be no negative impact to the chapel that we can see. Whilst the removal of the pews will mean that the chapel will look slightly different, the practical use of that space for the community outweighs the look of the hall.

The pews that we propose to remove will have a new lease of life in the Mission Hall Presbyterian Church in Neath which is also grade two listed. They will be used for additional seating for its rapidly growing congregation in the large lesser hall facility which houses a community cafe and soup kitchen.

It is important to state that the above changes are the only ones we wish to make. Our objective is purely to make the church functional for the community again with as little impact to the look of the church as possible. The Chapel will remain in its original Welsh chapel style and will not be modernised in its decoration. We understand the historical significance of this wonderful chapel and will do everything in our power to keep it as close to how it looked when it was built as possible.

There will be no change to the exterior of the building.

